



**Mitchell E. Daniels, Jr.**  
Governor

**Judith A. Monroe, M.D.**  
State Health Commissioner

# Indiana State Department of Health

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**DATE:** July 13, 2006

**TO:** All Local Health Departments  
Attn: Chief Food Specialist

**FROM:** A. Scott Gilliam, MBA, CFSP  
Manager, Food Protection Program

**SUBJECT:** Frozen, Stuffed, Raw Chicken Products

The following information has been received by our office from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA).

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## **FSIS ISSUES PUBLIC HEALTH ALERT FOR FROZEN, STUFFED, RAW CHICKEN PRODUCTS**

WASHINGTON, July 11, 2006 – The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS), in collaboration with the Minnesota Departments of Health and Agriculture, has recently investigated cases of salmonellosis associated with a class of frozen entrees that contain raw chicken. These frozen, breaded, boneless chicken products that may also be stuffed or filled and appear browned are raw and must be cooked to a safe minimum internal temperature of 165°F. Using a food thermometer is the only sure way of knowing food has reached a high enough temperature to destroy foodborne bacteria.

In addition to illnesses in Minnesota, there are least 34 cases of salmonellosis across the U.S. connected to consumption of uncooked chicken entrees. More than 25 companies produce and distribute frozen, raw chicken entrees at the retail level. The entrees come in many varieties, such as Chicken Cordon Bleu, Chicken Kiev, and Chicken with Mushrooms and Wine Sauce.

Because these products are often filled with additional ingredients, they may also take longer to reach a safe minimum internal temperature of 165°F than chicken breasts that do not contain fillings.

FSIS believes that in some cases, consumers may not realize that the breading on these products has only been pre-browned and these frozen entrees contain raw chicken. FSIS is also concerned that consumers may not be following cooking instructions or that because of the variability of microwave ovens, the instructions may not yield a product that reaches a safe minimum internal temperature of 165°F.

### **USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline**

**1-888-MPHOTLINE or visit  
[www.fsis.usda.gov](http://www.fsis.usda.gov)**

Products labeled with phrases such as "Cook and Serve," "Ready to Cook," and "Oven Ready" are intended to convey to the consumer that the product is raw or not ready-to-eat and must be fully cooked for safety. Although products may appear to be pre-cooked or browned, such products should be handled and prepared no differently than raw products.

Many frozen entrees containing stuffed boneless poultry products, such as a poultry product stuffed with cheese and other ingredients, are not-ready-to-eat and must be fully cooked as if they were raw.

Consumers must always follow the cooking instructions completely.

If using a microwave oven to cook meat and poultry products, be sure to take multiple temperature readings using a food thermometer at different locations throughout the product due to the non-uniformity of the heating process and the creation of "cold spots." Because a microwave oven typically cooks product at non-uniform rates, it is important to ensure that the product is covered sufficiently for steam to build in the product, and that the product is set aside for a sufficient time for the heat to uniformly spread throughout the product at the completion of the microwave cycle. This will ensure that there are no "cold spots."

**Epidemiology Resource Center**  
2525 N. Shadeland Ave. Suite E3, Indianapolis, IN 46219  
317.356.7190 ext. 253

**Laboratories**  
635 North Barhill Dr. Room 2031, Indianapolis, IN 46202  
317.233.8000

**Weights & Measures**  
2525 N. Shadeland Ave. Suite D3, Indianapolis, IN 46219  
317.356.7078 ext. 221

FSIS is requiring new labels for these products that clearly state that they contain raw chicken and must be fully cooked to a safe minimum internal temperature of 165°F. In addition, FSIS is taking steps to ensure that cooking instructions are effective, understandable and practical. Consumers should contact the manufacturer if following the cooking instructions is not practical or yields a product that is unacceptable in terms of taste or texture.

Consumers with food safety questions can “Ask Karen,” the FSIS virtual representative available 24 hours a day at [http://www.fsis.usda.gov/Food\\_Safety\\_Education/Ask\\_Karen/index.asp#Question](http://www.fsis.usda.gov/Food_Safety_Education/Ask_Karen/index.asp#Question). The toll-free USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline 1-888-MPHotline (1-888-674-6854) is available in English and Spanish and can be reached from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. (Eastern Time) Monday through Friday. Recorded food safety messages are available 24 hours a day.

Note: The full public health alert can be viewed at this link on the FSIS web site:

[http://www.fsis.usda.gov/News\\_&\\_Events/NR\\_070306\\_01/index.asp](http://www.fsis.usda.gov/News_&_Events/NR_070306_01/index.asp)

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If you have any questions, please feel free to call this office at 317-233-7360, or visit our website at <http://www.in.gov/isdh/regsvcs/foodprot/index.htm>